From: KRYPTN::xxxxxxxxx 27-AUG-1984 14:32
To: FREMEN::xxxxx
Subj: not the digital dictionary

Better print this one out--8+ pages long.

NOT

THE DIGITAL DICTIONARY

or

"A Fistful of Floppies"

A Guide to Understanding DECspeak,

Illogical Grammar, Misspellings,

Euphemisms, and other Code Words

Used in Digital Equipment Corporation

A

ADVERTISING: We don't believe in squandering money on telling people who we are and why our computers are good. If they really want to know, let them get the information through Arpanet--just like everyone else.

AGGRESSIVE: This is bad. Do not be aggressive, especially if you are female. (See also BITCH.)

ASSERTIVE: This, too, is a backhanded compliment. It means that you give good memo but aren't especially effective at getting results.

AUTHORITY: The only people who have this are a few Vice Presidents--and they're usually afraid to use it. People we hire from Raytheon have a rough adjustment period.

B

BITCH: A woman the speaker doesn't like. She is usually more intelligent than the speaker, otherwise he would

call her a dumb broad.

BOUNDED SYSTEM: One which would be useful if you could expand it. Which you can't.

BURP: No, this is not a belch. It's an acronym for a financial report that shows whether a product is making a profit or not. It is indicative of the sobriety of finance people that there are no funny jokes about this particular report.

Depending upon the product, a more suitable name for this report might be GROAN: "Get Ready--Orders Are Negative".

BUY-IN: No matter how trivial the project or decision, you will always have to get the "buy-in" of someone who doesn't understand what's going on. This increases the time spent on any given project by at least 50%, depending upon the recalcitrance of the targeted individual and the likelihood of impacting his vacation.

The probability of getting needed buy-ins was best explained by Corbin's Uncertainty Principle, which demonstrated that no one seems to know who's in charge.

C

CBI: Computer Based Instruction. We spend a lot of time and money writing manuals. We want you to READ them, dammit. To encourage you, we've made our Computer Based Instruction as tedious and incomprehensible as possible. If you're a normal person, you'll abandon the CBI and start using the manuals within two hours.

CONCERN: "Here's my concern..." What the speaker is REALLY saying is "You idiot, you've missed something I think is really important." (See also HELP.)

CUSTOMER: Anyone who does NOT work for DEC and who MIGHT someday buy a computer from us. In our egocentric way, we make no distinction between someone who does business with us (a customer) and someone who does not but might (a prospect.)

CUSTOMER-INSTALLABLE: A product is declared to be customer installable whenever we include a screwdriver in the shipping dunnage.

D

DECMATE: Computer chess term.

DE-SKILLING: When you ask a manufacturing supervisor why his techs can no longer assemble a system they've been assembling for ten years, he'll tell you proudly, "Oh, we've been actively de-skilling for several years".

This means that he's hiring people whose knuckles graze the ground and who receive no training.

DIALOGUE: In normal English, this is a noun, meaning a conversation between two people. In Digital, however, it is a verb very popular with people who scored less than 500 on their verbal SATs. The verb "to dialogue" means to discuss the subject at hand in as roundabout a fashion as possible, perhaps call a task force or two (see TASK FORCE), and do nothing. People who do nothing love to dialogue.

If you love to do nothing, say things like "Let's dialogue on that issue" frequently. You'll probably be offered a job in Sales Programs or Organizational Development.

DRI (DESIGNATED RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL): Most projects at Digital, be they in Engineering, Manufacturing, or Marketing, have a "DRI": the person whose ostensible job it is to see that the project is successful.

The DRI has no one working for him, and no one else on the project need listen to his advice or follow his directions. The DRI's REAL JOB is to be the cannon fodder should the project turn into a disaster. AVOID BEING CALLED THE DRI ON ANY PROJECT.

E

EASY-TO-USE: This is the most "in" kind of product to be involved in at Digital. All of our products are user-friendly and easy-to-use, especially RSX Sysgen, MACRO, and the microscopic diagram in the DECmate installation guide from which you're supposed to figure out where to jam all the cables from the second disk drive.

EMERGENCY: A recent Ken Olsen memo declared a state of emergency at Digital, likening the situation to that of a pilot in a difficult situation. When the memo reached DEC Japan, a senior Deckie read it and asked: "Excuse, please. Not understand memo. If Ken Olsen is pilot, why he not just fly plane?"

And folks wonder why Japan, Inc. is doing so well.

ENTRY-LEVEL: This is a term used to describe systems which are too weak to be usable and too cheap to be profitable. Marketing always wants to hype "entry-level" systems. Engineering likes to design them. No customer in his right mind wants to buy one. (ALSO SEE CUSTOMER-INSTALLABLE)

F

FEEDBACK: This is DECspeak for a cruel and uncalled-for remark. It is usually heard in the form "Let me give you some feedback", then followed by criticisms of your

voice, your clothes, your haircut, your accent, etc. Typically the "feedback" is delivered by some overweening manager you've never met before.

Never defend yourself; you risk getting more feedback on your defensive (also see AGGRESSIVE) behavior. Instead, just smile sweetly and thank your superior for his interest. In the open and frank spirit of the moment, offer him some feedback on his personal hygiene, weight problem, obvious toupee, boring presentation style, etc. Suggest some suitable courses for him/her to take.

FUTURES: Our marketing and sales organizations prefer selling futures to the products we actually manufacture at any given time. It is not clear whether this is due to their inability to sell what we have, or to Engineering's inability to build what customers want.

A task force, no doubt, will be formed to work the issue.

G

GIA: Branch of C.I.A. within Digital. The "I" does not stand for intelligence.

GENERAL-PURPOSE COMPUTERS: No one wakes up one morning and decides to buy a general-purpose computer; the buyer is usually quite specific on what purpose the computer will fill.

We say that PDP-11s and VAXes are general-purpose computers because we don't know what people do with them.

H

HELP: Careers are destroyed with too much help. You, too, can learn to help the people you want to get rid of. The following phrases will assist you:

a. "Help me understand that". Say this to your adversary at a large meeting after he has just made an amazingly silly statement. This will call everyone's attention to the fact not only that he is a complete idiot, but that you are a tactful and modest person.

b. "How can I help Irving?" Say this to Irving's boss, then point out Irving's many good qualities ("He seems to be trying his best") while making it clear that he is totally incompetent ("But he doesn't appear to be making much progress, and I know it's important"). Irving's boss will immediately recognize you as a helpful and tactful person, and will plan Irving as a "4" (Needs Help) on his next review. With any luck, Irving will be so incensed over his lousy raise that he'll quit DEC altogether.

I

IGNORANT: Do not be offended if someone says you are ignorant (uninformed or lacking knowledge); this is a treatable condition. Study, and your ignorance will decline.

Sadly, no cure has yet been found for sheer stupidity (although many stupid people have found gainful employment in Merrimack, weaving delightfully naive marketing plans and stringing one-of-a-kind packaged systems.)

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS: It is very important to get along with people at Digital, since the only way to get things done is to talk or trick people into it. (See AUTHORITY.)

Don't ever make anyone angry, or on your next performance review you will be criticized for your lack of "interpersonal skills" and will be packed off for a week of "Positive Power and Influence" or related psychobabble.

If you're liked by everyone, your performance review will state that you avoid confrontation; you will be packed off for a week of "Positive Power and Influence".

The simple truth is that NO ONE at Digital has interpersonal skills good enough to work here.

ISSUE: Issues are Digital's most flexible product. There are lots of things you can do with issues:

a. Table the issue (meaning do nothing)
b. Address the issue (look into it and then do nothing)
c. Visit the issue (say you did, then don't)
d. Revisit the issue (oh no, not that again)
e. Work the issue (spend a lot of time looking into details that have no bearing on the issue, then do nothing)
f. Let's work that issue off-line (let's not embarrass ourselves by talking about that mess in front of all these people)
g. I'm on top of that issue (I don't intend to do anything about it and don't want to talk about it.)

K

KERNAL: Most people at Digital are perfectly capable of spelling words such as psychosis (perhaps because it's so common), but are convinced that those little yellow things on a corncob COULDN'T POSSIBLY be spelled the same as the essence or core of a given product.

Don't let the constant misspelling confuse you. In fact, if you start spelling "kernel" with an A, you may have a promising career in Product Management.

See also INTERMITTANT, SEPERATE, and TRANSIANT.

K.O.: If K.O. likes it, it's O.K.

L

LOW-KEY: Certain people are said to be "Low-key". Don't let it be said about you. It means "does nothing, but doesn't make a fuss about it."

M

MARKETING: We don't do this at Digital. If the salespeople are too dumb to sell it and the customers too misguided to buy it--to hell with them.

O

OFF-LINE: This is the way we like to solve problems. Actually solving a problem during a meeting is disruptive to the process of the meeting (see PROCESS.) So we take the problems "off-line" (look into them at some later date, preferably never.)

ORDER PROCESSING: We think processing orders is absolutely fascinating (see PROCESS). Actually filling the orders is a boring and repetitive task in which we have very little interest, so we assign it to our most junior people. (See DE-SKILLING.)

P

PHASE REVIEW: Products have phases, described and defined in the Phase Review Planner. Most people take these seriously. Don't be fooled. The whole Phase Review Process is just a ritual. A more accurate definition of the product's phases follows:

PHASE 0: Somebody in Engineering feels his career is slipping. He finagles a pile of money to do a feasibility study, and starts saying that the Marketing people are too naive to understand the wonderfulness of his Widget just yet. Approval to proceed to Phase 1 is granted.

PHASE 1: Prototype Widgets start churning out like croissants at Bloomingdale's. An argument breaks out as to whether the product is really going to provide "incremental business" (business we wouldn't have won with any other products we already have).

A task force (see TASK FORCE) is formed which recommends a major market study (for which no funds exist) and the creation of a new marketing group to focus on the issue (see ISSUE).

PHASE 2: Entrance into Phase 2 involves a mandatory six-month slip in the project due either to Marketing unreadiness to cope with the problem, or to a power supply design error. The DRI (see DRI) must select the

reason for the slip.

At the last minute, Field Service declares the product to be inherently unreliable, and Sales Programs decides to delay the announcement until a suitable occasion presents itself. The Technical OEM group wants to proceed because Schlumberger has said they'll buy 2,000 Widgets per year if we do a special hotwired version just for them.

A task force is formed to work the issue off-line. A compromise is reached: we will have a "Program Announcement", whereby we send out a one-paragraph press release announcing our intention to pursue the widget market. Electronic Design breaks the story first: "DIGITAL TO INVEST MILLIONS IN NEW WOOGGET--ABANDONING VAX CUSTOMER BASE". All other media wisely ignore the announcement. Twenty VAX customers cancel orders.

At announcement time, the product slips another three months because some goof forgot to place an order for the now-corrected power supplies. There is a slight flurry of activity until a minimum-wage clerk is found to pin the blame on.

Phase 3: The product's been announced for a year now, and we've sold two. One has been returned. The original Engineering Manager has taken a job with Apollo and the Marketing group has reorganized. A new Vice-President in charge of Widgets is named, with a 300-person group to re-engineer, improve, find third-party software for, and figure out how to sell Widgets in the retail/dealer channel.

A $6M television advertising campaign is launched with the snappy slogan "We Change the Way the Widget Winks". It is cancelled when the Vice-President goes to Sun Microsystems.

Phase 4: Manufacturing notices that we've sold two Widgets in the last six months and proposes that we terminate production. The line is shut down. Two weeks later, a salesman in Washington wins an order for ten Widgets. The line is restarted at a cost of $1.5M.

Phase 5: The Washington order is cancelled.

PROCESS: We love process at Digital. We even hold meetings to discuss the process of holding meetings. You can get instant recognition as manager material if you come to a meeting and say things like:

a. "I have a process question" This will free everyone at the meeting from doing any work at all and allow them instead to discuss how they propose to conduct the meeting. This usually begins and ends with re-arranging the chairs and tables in the room.

b. "The process is what's causing the problem". This is a REALLY brilliant move, since now everyone can spend his/her time bitching about how impossible Digital is to work for, instead of solving the problem. Better yet, the person who caused the problem is now free from all blame. Say this loudly when the person who is clearly to blame for the screwup is both high-ranking and in the room.

PRODUCT MANAGER: At some point in your career, you will either have to deal with a product manager or BE one. It's important to know whether you're dealing with a fool or not. The acid test: Ask him to describe what he does.

WRONG ANSWER (BEWARE, TURKEY AT 12:00 HIGH): "I facilitate, coordinate, and in general ensure that all the right buy-ins are obtained to see that the process is working properly". If he also says things like "Let's dialogue on that issue," run to the nearest exit. The guy is useless.

RIGHT ANSWER: "I make sure that sales can sell it, service can fix it, and manufacturing can build it." Hooray! You're talking to someone who, if nothing else, believes that he's responsible for something happening.

PROJECT PLAN: The document to which all participants swear fealty--at least until the ink dries.

Q

QUALITY CONTROL: Very important at Digital. If we don't carefully control quality, it might get out of hand.

R

REORGANIZATION: This is the best way to avoid work. If you are a manager, keep your group in a state of anxiety by constantly reorganizing--once a year is enough to both avoid producing any meaningful output, and to get a "2" on your performance review in recognition of the fine job you did re-structuring the team environment, re-defining job responsibilities, and re-training everyone. Remember to change jobs once a year.

RISK: We don't take risks at Digital. We've spent the last few years assiduously setting up review boards, phase review criteria, administrative roadblocks, task forces, planning requirements, prolonged testing, and compatibility standards. We then diluted authority across the widest possible range of special-interest groups to further ensure that no one can cut someone else's red tape.

Go ahead--try and take a risk. Someone will reach out and grab you by the scruff of your neck, just as your mother did the time you were five and wanted to try out your brother's new two-wheeler.

S

STOCK OPTION: At Tobin's, consists of beef, chicken, or vulcanized cheeseburgers. In the vending machines, it's cheeseburgers only.

STUPIDITY: Never attribute to maliciousness that which can be explained by mere stupidity.

T

TASK FORCE: This is a group which generates a lot of memos (preferably EMS rather than hard copy), a lengthy recommendation report (lots of appendices, charts, and graphs) and then does nothing. The task force usually concludes its report by recommending the formation of another task force to really work the issue (see ISSUE).

Task forces are lots of fun to work on. They give you a good excuse for not doing your current job ("Gee, boss, I'm sorry, but you know that task force is taking up a lot of my time"), while making it possible for you to decline any really work-heavy assignments on the task force ("My current responsibilities prohibit me from volunteering for that task.")

TBD: To Be Determined. You usually see these initials on organization charts, meaning they refuse to give the job to the underling who's probably earned it and haven't found a burned-out old wreck who'll accept it. Never accept a job which reports to a TBD. If you are a burned-out old wreck yourself, be on the lookout for TBDs.

TRAINING: You won't get any at Digital unless you decide to spend your nights and weekends reading manuals. Do so. Don't swell the ranks of the ignorant. Just because your boss wouldn't know a VAX if it fell on him doesn't mean that you shouldn't.

TRAINING, SALES: This is where many tired-out salespeople go to work when they've had it with chasing cables. (See also GIA.)

V

VENUS: An engineering project which has taken longer to finish than it took Franco to die.

W

WORK: It's not supposed to be fun. That's why they call it "work."

Contributions for additional entries welcome!!

regards